

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS,
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The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Room 3E880
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

Early in December I traveled to Iraq for the fifteenth time since April 2003. My staff and I met with US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, the US Embassy country team, US military commanders, President Jalal Talabani, and Iraq's National Security Advisor, Parliamentarians and Police.

Before arriving in Iraq, we held senior-level meetings with officials in Egypt and Turkey to discuss the situation in Iraq. In Jordan, we met with the United Nations Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General for Iraq and with Iraqi Parliamentarians.

In my letter of October 2, sent to you after my fourteenth visit to Iraq, I wrote, “I made it clear to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki that while I continue to support our joint efforts to bring democracy and stability to Iraq, the American people have every right to expect Shia, Sunni and Kurds resolve their differences, end the violence, and move to replace Coalition Forces with Iraqi Security Forces in police operations and combat patrolling.”

In that letter I also recommended:

- We encourage Iraqi leaders to establish a timeline for each element of Prime Minister al-Maliki’s national reconciliation plan. There should be dates certain for provincial elections, the rollback of de-Baathification, amnesty, allocation of oil revenues, and central government control of militias, or their disbandment.
- We provide the Iraqis a firm timeline so they know we will not be there forever and begin to take the difficult but necessary diplomatic and political steps required to unite their country and reduce the violence.

On December 6, The Iraq Study Group called for steps similar to those I recommended after my August visit, writing that “the primary mission of US forces in Iraq should evolve to one of supporting the Iraqi army, which would take over primary responsibility for combat operations,” and “the United States should work closely with Iraq’s leaders to support the achievement of specific objectives – or milestones – on national reconciliation, security and governance.”

My December 2-3 visit confirmed my earlier recommendations and also corroborates many of the findings of the Iraq Study Group. I again pressed Iraqi leaders to achieve national reconciliation and to transition Iraqi Forces to full responsibility for security operations so US troops can withdraw to bases and ultimately return home.

The following observations and recommendations result from my December visit to Iraq, and to Egypt, Turkey and Jordan.

Observation: Iraqi leaders recommended US and Coalition street patrols in urban areas be reduced and eventually eliminated.

Recommendation: US and Coalition troops should expedite the transfer of street patrol responsibility to the Iraqi Army and Police, and allow Iraqi forces to provide security for Iraqi citizens throughout the country.

Observation: US officials and commanders and Iraqi leaders acknowledge the violence and instability are due in large part to the failure of the political leadership to resolve issues of national reconciliation.

Recommendation: While the US cannot dictate the terms of national reconciliation, it must make clear to Iraqi political leaders that without agreement the United States will be forced to withdraw its forces prematurely.

Observation: Iraqi leaders and US officials said Iraq has \$25 billion in cash it cannot spend because its ministries do not have the capacity to manage expenditures. Moreover, Iraq is not moving rapidly to develop its oil sector, which could yield hundreds of billions of dollars.

Recommendation: Other US agencies such as the Departments of Treasury and Energy should assist Iraqi ministries in managing their cash resources and help develop oil production.

Observation: Shia “death squad” attacks on Sunni neighborhoods and a failure by the Iraqi Government to provide essential services to Sunni neighborhoods are causing Sunnis to turn to extremist elements.

Recommendation: The United States should urge the Iraqi Government, as the Study Group has also recommended, to “send a clear signal to Sunnis that there is a place for them in national life...unless Sunnis believe they can get a fair deal in Iraq through the political process, there is no prospect the insurgency will end.”

This initiative should include: holding provincial elections to give Sunni-majority cities and towns democratic representation; stopping militia "death squads" attacks on Sunnis; providing for Sunni participation in Government policies and decisions; delivering essential services to Sunni neighborhoods; broadening de-Baathfication to return qualified Iraq professionals to jobs in

government; and engaging in a review of the Constitution.

Observation: American military commanders state there are 112 Iraqi Army battalions of 757 soldiers each. This is a total of 84,784 soldiers on duty in combat units. On any given day, absences, both authorized and unauthorized, may reduce this number by approximately 20%.

This leaves a total of approximately 67,000 Iraqi Army soldiers on duty in combat units, ultimately representing only one-half the size of the frequently cited number of 137,500 “trained and equipped” Iraqi Army personnel. Moreover, US Army trainers have formally assessed many of these Iraqi Army battalions to be far from capable of carrying out operations on their own without US units fighting alongside them.

Recommendation: It is absolutely imperative accurate statistics always be provided to Congress and the American public. Accurate statistics help determine when US forces can “stand down” and Iraqi forces can “stand up.”

And, as I recommended after my fourteenth visit, the Iraqi government should increase the size of its security forces to at least 440,000 personnel, the number which experts at my Subcommittee’s hearings testified is the realistic force level to serve Iraq’s population.

Observation: US military commanders pointed out lives of American Soldiers and Marines could be saved if Iraqis were provided economic incentives. With jobs, young Iraqi men will have an alternative to the money insurgents offer them. US military commanders praised the Department of Defense’s Industrial Revitalization Initiative to create jobs by finding buyers for the products of Iraqi factories.

Recommendation: Congress and the Administration should work together to support job creation for Iraqi men by ramping up the Industrial Revitalization Initiative.

Observation: Turkey and Egypt support a regional conference of Iraq's neighbors to halt supply of military, intelligence and financial support to various Iraqi factions. This is consonant with the recommendation of the Iraq Study Group. Iraq has expressed its overall agreement to a conference, provided it first has separate meetings with each of its neighbors and the outcome of the conference is predetermined.

Recommendation: The Iraqi Government should convene a regional conference once it has met individually with its neighbors. Each neighboring state must be urged to provide support and assistance in countering the insurgency and terrorist elements in Iraq.

Observation: Turkey and Egypt are in communication with Syria, and to a lesser extent with Iran. President Talabani recently returned from Iran and reported Iran wishes to talk directly with the United States concerning Iraq and possibly other matters.

Recommendation: The United States should engage in direct discussions with both Syria and Iran on Iraq.

Iraq is clearly in crisis. The United States is at war in a complex situation, where our men and women of the US Armed Forces are in the cross-fire of an insurgency and sectarian conflict. Iraq's political leaders must take immediate and decisive action to achieve national reconciliation which will help curtail the insurgency and sectarian conflict.

In closing, I am attaching an October 6 letter, sent to Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, proposing four steps to help us succeed in Iraq. These steps in large measure parallel the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group and would help drive the agenda by establishing timelines, supporting national reconciliation, encouraging dialogue among Iraq's neighbors, and asking the Iraqi people in a plebiscite whether or not they want our continued assistance. I believe these steps, if implemented, will help bring most of our troops home and move Iraq toward a democratic society that is able to survive in a very hostile part of the world.

As always, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters with you more fully. If you have any questions or would like additional information on these observations and recommendations, please contact me at 202-225-5541, or one of my staff, Dr. R. Nicholas Palarino, Staff Director, or Mr. Robert Kelley, Chief Counsel, at 202-225-2548.

Sincerely,

Christopher Shays
Chairman

cc: Rep. Tom Davis
Rep. Henry Waxman
Rep. Kenny Marchant
Rep. Dennis Kucinich

Encl.